

Relationship Management During COVID-19 Pandemic

Spring Health recognizes we're all experiencing loss right now. We're grieving the loss of our normal routines and activities, as well as our typical interactions with others. The term "social distancing" has become one we're familiar with, but it may be helpful to reframe the concept. The kind of distance we really need is physical, as maintaining social connections has never been more important. Our provider community agrees. Here are some ideas from Spring Health clinicians about managing different relationships in our lives during this time.



CHILDREN

I want to talk with my child about the pandemic, but where do I start? How candid should I be?

- Asking your child what they already know about the virus is a great place to start. With so much information available, and not all of it accurate, it's important to ensure that your child has the facts.
- It's okay to be honest about your emotions, but talk about what gives you comfort and hope during times of uncertainty. Our children are sponges when it comes to emotions, especially fear and anxiety. While being honest is important, be sure to share your thoughts in a calm and even tone, and limit the amount of details you share.
- Should your child ask you a specific question about the virus, it's okay to answer - to an extent. Specific figures and statistics are not always necessary or helpful. If you don't know the answer, be honest about that too! It gives you and your child an opportunity to seek the answer together.
- Remember to check in with your child regularly so they feel safe and supported.

Are there resources I could use to make the conversation easier?

- [Child Mind](#) is a great tool for supporting children through COVID-19.
- [National Child Traumatic Stress Network \(NCTSN\)](#): provides simple, stress-reducing activities for children and teens.
- [Mightier](#) offers free, downloadable exercises and worksheets to help your child understand their emotions.
- [The CoviBook](#), by Mindheart.co, explains COVID-19 to kids and is available in multiple languages.



TEENS

How should I engage my teenager in a conversation about the pandemic?

- Openly discuss changes for the family, community and society during and after the pandemic. The goal here is to help them manage expectations.
- Use discussions about COVID-19 to inspire hope and optimism. Are there opportunities to express gratitude for good health? Are there safe ways to help others during this time?
- Encourage your teenager to discuss their thoughts and ideas for maintaining wellness, education and daily routines during the pandemic.
- It's OK if the conversation gets candid. There's no need to dive into specific statistics or share heavy news headlines, but if your teen asks about something they've seen or heard, don't be afraid to talk about it.

My teen is prone to anxiety. How can I best support them?

- Encourage your teen to develop a unique coping statement such as, "I will get through this day." Repeat the statement together, and urge them to say it when they feel anxiety setting in.
- Help your teenager reframe anxious thoughts into positive, optimistic ones. For example, if your teen is afraid they'll never see their friends again, encourage them to think about a fun activity to plan with friends in the future.
- Engage your teenager in deep breathing or guided meditation exercises to help reduce stress.
- Help your teenager maintain regular routines for meals, hygiene, physical activity, and education.

Are there specific changes in behavior I should be concerned about?

- **Mood swings.** As a parent, you know your teen better than anyone. Trust your gut when you notice a shift in mood that is out of character.
- **Physical symptoms.** Look for changes in eating, sleeping or an increase in physical ailments like stomach aches, headaches or backaches. Take note if your teen is neglecting personal appearance and hygiene. Also be aware of decline in energy and activity levels. These could be signs that mental health support and treatment is needed.
- **Self-medicating.** Look for signs of drug or alcohol use, self-harming behaviors, eating disorders, and avoidant behaviors.

Are there resources that could be helpful for my teenager?

- **The Center for Disease Control** offers tips for [stress and coping](#).
- **The Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)** created a [document](#) with tips for caring for our mental health. It also offers several [publications and digital products](#) for dealing with infectious diseases, and a [helpline](#) for individuals and families dealing with substance abuse.
- **The National Eating Disorder Association** has a [helpline](#) for support and treatment options.
- **The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** provides [24/7 free and confidential support](#) for people in distress.



COUPLES

My partner and I have different outlooks on the pandemic. How should we handle that?

- Remember the importance of respecting each other's ideas and opinions, and try to limit discussion about the pandemic.
- If disagreements evolve into arguments, try to take a step back. Avoid making major decisions about your relationship until life has returned to normalcy.

How do my partner and I handle conflict when we're stuck in the same space?

- Give each other some time to calm down. Walk away and find a quiet space. Use that time to reflect or practice relaxation techniques.
- Think about journaling your feelings when you're starting to feel frustrated or angry.
- If you find yourselves in a heated exchange, use more "I" statements and fewer "you" statements.
- Try some grounding exercises with your partner to bring yourselves back to the present.
- Redirect the conversation! Instead of dwelling on the negative, try making lists about fun things you want to do in the future, or reminisce about things you've done together in the past.

How do I establish alone time without hurting my partner's feelings?

- Create a schedule that includes time apart from each other, and set the expectation that daily alone time is necessary.
- Give each other a window of time after finishing work. Listen to music, workout, or go get the mail by yourself.

Are there resources you recommend to help keep my relationship strong?

- **Healthline.com** offers [30 grounding techniques](#) to quiet distressing thoughts. Try these on your own or with your partner.
- **Newsweek** provide [tips from dating experts](#) for keeping the spark alive during isolation.
- **Psychology Today** published an article about [avoiding a COVID-19 divorce](#).



ELDERLY

How do I express concern to my elderly loved ones without seeming ageist?

- Ask them about their concerns first. Find out about their experience in dealing with past adversities and how they've dealt with their emotions. Start where they are and find out how they're impacted by the current situation.
- It's important not to focus on age but, instead, that you're concerned. After all, you love them and only want them to be safe and healthy!

What should I say when an elderly friend or family member isn't taking the risks seriously?

- Talk about your concerns without demanding they change their behaviors. Let them know that you respect their ability to make their own decisions, but ultimately their health and wellbeing is most important.
- If they choose not to alter their behavior, be candid about boundaries that you need to put in place as a result (less contact with grandchildren, fewer visits, etc.).

How can I help reduce anxiety or fear?

- Keep an open dialogue. Talk to them about what they're worried or fearful about.
- Try to focus on the positive and things that are currently within their control.
- Encourage them to continue practicing good habits like exercising, eating well and getting enough sleep.
- Suggest they return to past interests or develop a new hobby like painting, writing, singing, reading, etc.
- Show them relaxation exercises like deep breathing, body scanning, meditation, etc.

How can I help them feel socially connected?

- Write letters! It's a memorable way to touch the people you love and makes going to the mailbox fun again.
- If they don't already know how, show them how to video chat with friends and family.
- Go through picture albums and reminisce.
- Look at this as an opportunity to reconnect in a way that might not have otherwise been possible. This extra time at home is more quality time to spend with the ones you love.

How can I help them feel socially connected?

- **Johns Hopkins Medicine** offers a helpful article on [caregiving for the elderly](#).
- **The Family Caregiving Alliance** offers [various articles and resources](#) for older adults and family caregivers.
- **The World Economic Forum** provides tips to [help the elderly stay connected](#).